

Where does „Żubrówka” come from?

The history of bison grass could have sound like that:

Long time ago, a tired traveller, while walking through the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, decided to have a rest in the blocks of the Białowieża Primeval Forest. He stopped in a beautiful clearing near the village of Białowieża, fascinated by birds singing and by swoosh of old oaks. Near a tree stump, he found a handful of long, dried grass with a wonderful aroma. Suddenly he heard tumult and saw a herd of big bisons running near the clearing. All of a sudden the wind began to blow. It made one of the blades fell into his bottle with apple wine. The traveller used to drink it when he was thirsty. After that, the thunderstorm broke, but the traveller luckily took shelter from the rain.

After some time, the traveller opened the bottle and found out that the wine changed its smell and taste. Thanks to one blade of grass spouted by bison from the Białowieża Primeval Forest and dried by the sun, the traveller discovered the characteristics of the grass called today Bison grass. He told this to other travellers and the story about Bison grass got to the Byczewski distillery from Lwow. He was the first XVII century producer of alcohol beverage named “Żubrówka”. Fans of this beverage say that it tastes best when it is mixed with apple juice.

“Żubrówka” is not the delicacy of bisons. Bison grass is a plant with medicinal properties that grows in natural environment in Central and Eastern Europe, Siberia and North America. The best grass grows only in the Białowieża Primeval Forest, which lies in Podlaskie Voivodship and in Belarus. One can find there *Hierochloe odorata*, often called bison grass. Its particular taste and aroma made our ancestors often call it vanilla or holy grass. The grass is picked in early summer because of its aroma qualities. The blades of the grass should have the same length, color and age. Chosen specimens are dried in the sun. The grass grows up even to 50 cm.

It owes its specific aroma to the presence of coumarin. Derivatives of coumarin have antispasmodic properties. Bison grass is used in herbal medicine, manufacture of alcoholic beverages and to flavor soft drinks and perfumes. The bison grass is also appreciated by cooks and connoisseur, who add this herb to fish and meat dishes, mainly venison.

In Europe, vodka “Żubrówka” became a symbol of craftsmanship in Polish distilling industry. The old recipe says: good grass – good vodka. A blade of grass is required. Żubrówka consumers assert that not only does the vodka refresh but also it gives a bison power. What is this power from? It comes from coumarin - cyclic compounds, which can be found in bison grass. It has stimulating and energizing properties.

The Białowieża Forest, placed in Poland, is the most precious part of the Primeval Forest, which is protected as the Białowieża National Park. The Białowieża National Park was found in 1921. Its area covers 105001,95 ha, and 45% of it is strictly protected. The Special Protection Area and the Bison Breeding Reserve are the places which all visitors wish to see. The high status of the Białowieża National Park has been emphasized by recognizing it as the World Biosphere Reserve by UNESCO in 1977 and listing it on the World Heritage register in 1979.

The most popular inhabitant of the Białowieża Forest is bison. Bisons lived in the forests for ages but during the World War I they were totally exterminated. After many years of difficult restitution it was possible to create a free breed. At the moment the population of the free herd, spread on the whole territory of the Forest, amounts to over 230 European bisons.